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ABSTRACT

The use of a needs assessment instrument as part of the evaluation of a statewide systems change grant, "Increasing Transition Opportunities for Connecticut Youth with Disabilities," is described. A Connecticut Transition Needs Assessment instrument was revised to include seven school components and five community components identified as critical for comprehensive transition planning. This instrument and methodology can be used by school districts and communities for measuring progress in transition programming and resources for youth with disabilities. Twelve school districts served as demonstration sites and participated in the baseline Needs Assessment Study of 1993. The communities varied greatly in the current status of transition programs and resources. The comparison of the baseline data and the post-needs assessment data that will be collected in years three and five of the grant (1995 and 1997) will provide a measure of how well the system's change initiative has increased the transition programming and resources for Connecticut youth with disabilities. Eight tables and four figures present the data. (Contains 1 reference.) (Author/SLD)

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ED 371 012

Using a Transition Needs Assessment as an Evaluation Tool

for a Statewide Effort to Increase Transition Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present the use of a needs assessment instrument as part of the evaluation of a state-wide systems change grant, "Increasing Transition Opportunities for Connecticut Youth with Disabilities."

A Connecticut Transition Needs Assessment instrument was revised to include seven school components and five community components identified as critical for comprehensive transition planning. This instrument and methodology can be used by school districts and communities for measuring progress in transition programming and resources for youth with disabilities.

Twelve school districts that were selected as demonstration sites for the systems change grant participated in the baseline Needs Assessment study (1993). The communities varied considerably regarding their current status of transition programs and resources. Most districts were in the beginning stage regarding follow-up of students exiting school. A third of the districts were in the beginning stage regarding parent involvement, collaboration and assessment. Most of the sites lacked knowledge regarding community resources.

The comparison of the baseline data and the post-needs assessment data, that will be collected in years three and five of the grant (1995 and 1997), will provide a measure of how well the systems change initiative has increased the transition programming and resources for Connecticut youth with disabilities.

A. Objectives

The purpose of this paper is to present the use of a needs assessment instrument as part of the evaluation of a state-wide systems change grant to increase transition opportunities for youth with disabilities.

Specifically, this part of the evaluation had the following objectives:

1. To develop an assessment instrument that would determine the needs of Connecticut school districts and their communities to utilize in transition program planning and development.

2. To gather information regarding the current (baseline) status of transition programming in the 12 demonstration sites regarding the implementation of seven school components and five community components identified as critical for comprehensive transition planning.

3. To determine if the Action Plans developed by the 12 demonstration sites were responsive to the needs that had been identified in their respective needs assessments.

4. To determine the gains regarding increasing transition opportunities and programs for youth with disabilities by comparing the baseline needs assessment in Year 1 of the project (1993) with needs assessments completed by the demonstration sites in years three and five of the project (1995 and 1997).

B. Perspective/Framework

During the 1980's transition planning for students with disabilities emerged as one of the top priorities of the federal Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS). Amendments to the Education of the Handicapped Act of 1983 (P.L. 98-199) authorized a grants initiative to support research and development of transition planning services and programs. In 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) included a transition amendment that defined transition and required services.

Three additional legislative acts have emphasized integrated access to, and opportunities for vocational education, employment and community life; these include the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1990, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990).

Recently, OSERS has awarded grants for state-wide systems change to increase transition opportunities for youth with disabilities. The state of Connecticut received one of these grants from OSERS in the fall of 1992.

Significant progress has been made in the last ten years to identify those transition components critical to include in school programming, service provision, and community access for youth with disabilities.

It is now equally important to determine effective ways to measure the progress of school districts' efforts to meet the needs of youth with disabilities as they transition from school to community life.

C. Method and Data Source

A Connecticut Transition Needs Assessment instrument that was developed in 1989 was revised in March, 1993 to include community as well as school components.

The seven school components include:

1. Assessment/Evaluation
2. Curriculum, Instruction and Recreation
3. Vocational Training
4. Collaboration and Linkages
5. Parent Involvement
6. Individual Transition Plans/IEP's
7. Follow-up Procedures

The community areas include:

1. Postsecondary Education
2. On-the-Job Training and Employment
3. Transportation
4. Housing
5. Recreation/Leisure Activities

Twelve school districts were selected as demonstration sites for the systems change grant. Some districts were selected that were in the beginning stage of transition development and others were selected that had made significant progress in transition development. In February, 1993 Three Transition Specialists were each assigned to four districts. They assisted each site with developing a local Transition Team consisting of school personnel, parents, students, employers, agency representatives and others from the community involved in the transition process.

For their first activity, each team was required to complete the Connecticut Transition Needs Assessment and utilize this information for developing local Action Plans. Representatives from all 12 teams attended a workshop on collaboration in April that gave them the opportunity to practice the process and begin to identify transition needs. Between April and June of 1993, the Transition Specialists assisted each team to complete the assessment and to develop goals and objectives for the Action Plans. The evaluator observed the teams and their process of completing the assessment and developing plans. The evaluator summarized the data for the 12 demonstration sites to determine the current (baseline) status of transition programming. Then each team's needs assessment was compared to their action plan to determine if the goals and objectives were related to the identified needs.

D. Results

The Connecticut Transition Needs Assessment Summary Report (Espinola & Halliday, 1993) presents the results for the 12 sites regarding the implementation of the seven school and five community components identified as critical for comprehensive transition planning.

The results for the 12 demonstration sites showed that the communities varied considerably regarding their current status of transition component development. As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, most districts (75%) were in the beginning stage regarding follow-up procedures. A third of the sites were in the beginning stage regarding parent involvement, collaboration, and assessment; a fourth of the sites were in the beginning stage of Individual Transition Plans.

Half (50%) of the districts were "in progress" regarding parent involvement and collaboration; 67% of the districts rated themselves as "in progress" regarding assessment and individual transition plans, and 83% said they were "in progress" regarding curriculum for meeting transition needs. Eight percent (8%), rated themselves as "fully developed" in the areas of follow-up, parent involvement and individual transition plans. Figures 2, 3 and 4 present the data for each of the three regions.

Most of the Local Transition Teams showed a lack of knowledge regarding community resources, i.e. post- secondary education and support programs, the employers who hire youth with disabilities, and recreation activities available in the community. All of the Teams said that their communities were not doing very well in meeting the needs of youth with disabilities in obtaining employment, transportation and housing.

Other results indicating a need for further development were the following: 92% of the school districts did not have a formal mission statement for the transition of youth with disabilities as they move from high school into adult roles in the community; 50% did not have written guidelines for secondary transition planning for students with disabilities; and 50% did not have peer support groups or Job Clubs.

On the positive side, 83% said they assisted students with disabilities in securing on-the-job training in permanent job placements prior to or immediately upon leaving school and 100% said students with disabilities participate in school extra-curricular activities.

When the assessment data and the Action Plans were compared, the 12 demonstration districts were responsive to the needs that had been identified. The Action Plans varied in the number of needs addressed, with the range being two to five objectives.

E. Educational Importance of the Study

This study provides a methodology that can be replicated by others for evaluating systems change of any nature. It specifically provides an instrument and methodology that can be used by school districts and communities for measuring progress in transition programming and community opportunities for youth with disabilities.

The comparison of the baseline needs assessment data and the post-needs assessment data that will be collected in years three and five of the grant will show whether the districts have responded to the transition needs that were identified.

References

Espinola, D. L. & Halliday, K. (1993). The Connecticut Transition Needs Assessment Summary Report. Middletown, Connecticut: State Department of Education

For copies of the above report, write to Karen Halliday, State Department of Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, 06457.

Table 1
Status of Transition Components

COMPONENT	Beginning	In Between	In Progress	Fully Developed
Follow-Up	75%	0%	17%	8%
Parent	33%	8%	50%	8%
Collaboration	33%	17%	50%	0%
Assessment	33%	0%	67%	0%
ITP's	25%	0%	67%	8%
Vocational Training	17%	25%	58%	0%
Curriculum	8%	8%	83%	0%

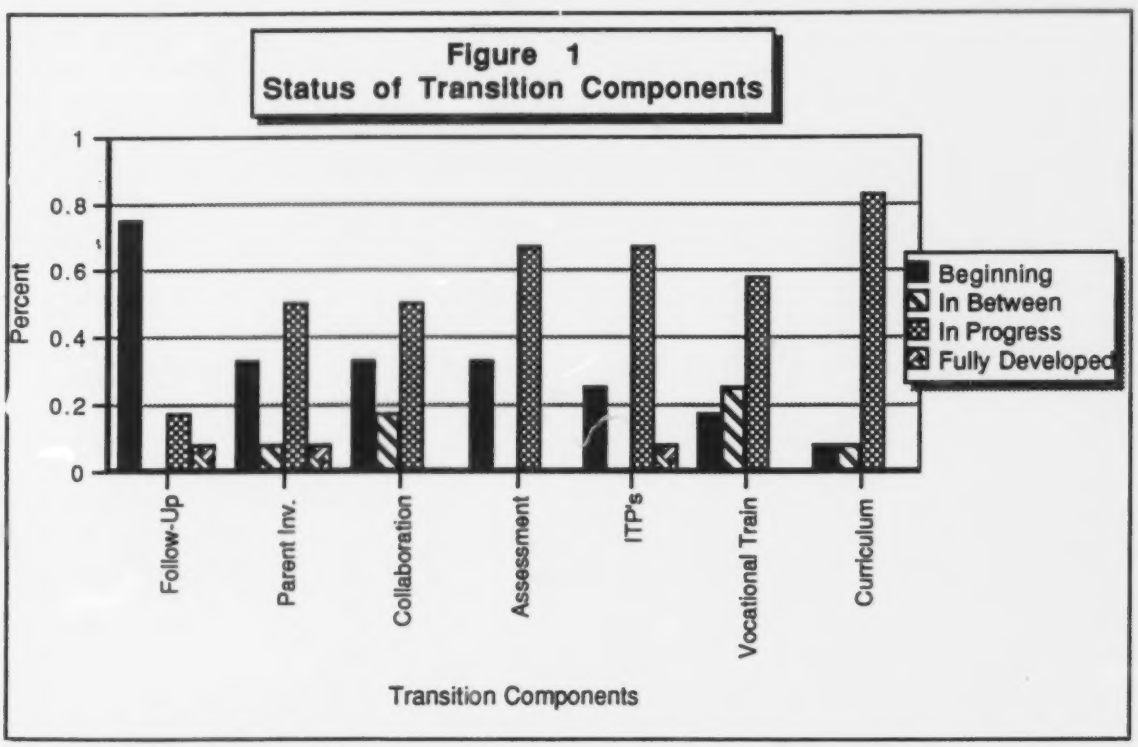

Table 6 Eastern Region: Status of Transition Components

	Follow-Up	Parent Inv.	Collaboratior	Assessment	ITP's	Voc. Training	Curriculum
Beginning	0.75	0.25	0.25	0.5	0.25	0	0
In Between	0	0.25	0.25	0	0	0.25	0.25
In Progress	0.25	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.75	0.75
Fully Dev.	0	0	0	0	0.25	0	0

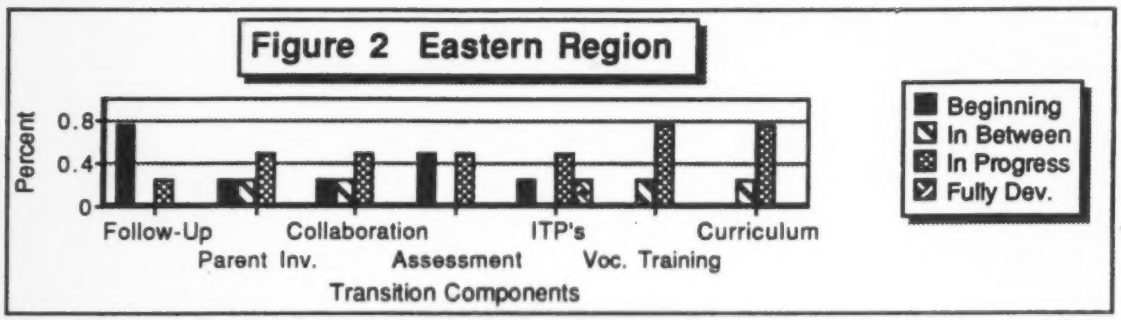

Table 7 Central Region: Status of Transition Components

	Follow-Up	Parent Inv.	Collaboratior	Assessment	ITP's	Voc. Training	Curriculum
Beginning	0.75	0	0.5	0.25	0.25	0	0
In Between	0	0	0.25	0	0	0.5	0
In Progress	0.25	1	0.25	0.75	0.75	0.5	1
Fully Dev.	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

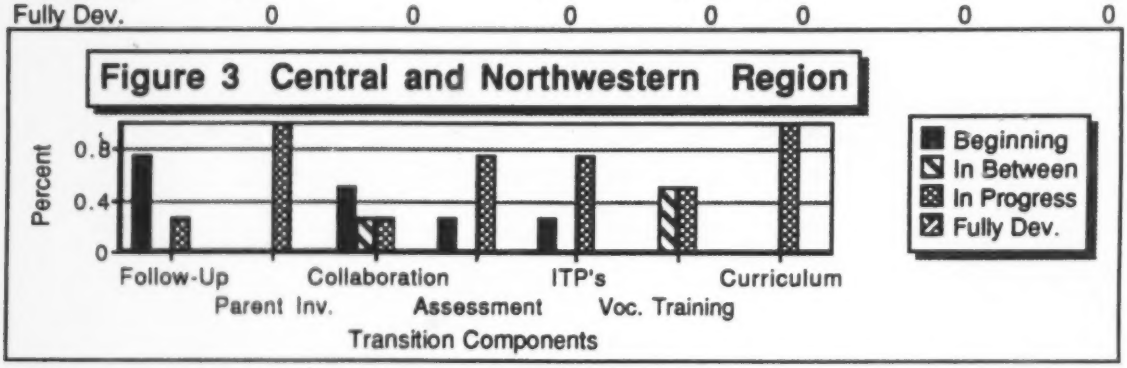

Table 8 Southern Region: Status of Transition Components

	Follow-Up	Parent Inv.	Collaboratior	Assessment	ITP's	Voc. Training	Curriculum
Beginning	0.75	0.75	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.5	0.25
In Between	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
In Progress	0	0	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.5	0.75
Fully Dev.	0.25	0.25	0	0	0	0	0